

## Good food for hard times...or any time

By Jo Mason

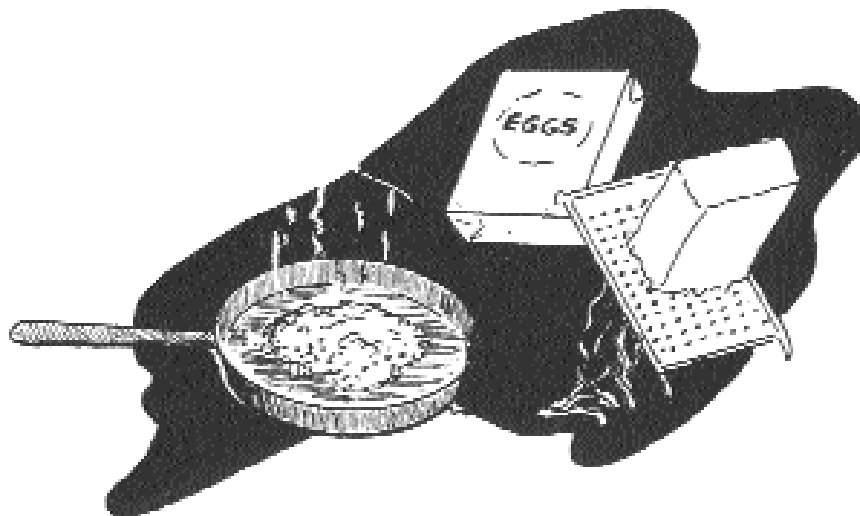
**T**he other day at the store, I stood in front of the shelf for five minutes, debating over which brand or size of salsa to buy. Finally, I couldn't bring myself to pay \$2.58 for a jar, so I went home and made some. And it took less time than I'd spent trying to decide! (About three minutes.)

The ability to "cook cheap" may not be something you'll use every day—or even every month. But like a nest egg tucked under the mattress, it's a nice thing to have when you need it. The bonus? Good nutrition and, generally speaking, foods in their more natural states are less expensive, naturally higher in complex carbohydrates and fiber, and lower in fat and sodium.

But are they really worth your time? Only you can decide that. As for me, I figure I made (saved) around \$28 an hour on the salsa and I make a \$59-an hour pizza whose name tells it all. And it's better than any you can buy. The recipe is at the end of this article.

What do you need in the way of equipment? Basically, just your everyday, common pots, pans, and sense. (Like me, you may have a favorite appliance. The blender and Crock-pot are two of mine.) But I've found that some "labor saving" devices actually create work. A food processor, for instance, is a great help when you have a ton of cheese or cabbage to shred—but then it must be taken apart and cleaned. For small jobs, I simply use an old-fashioned grater.

As in any important endeavor, you need a blueprint for success—in other words, a plan. This means not only a grocery list, but a detailed, weekly menu. Remember that coined word from the women's magazines—**planned-overs**? It still makes sense not to just recycle leftovers, but to



plan on them when you draw up your menu. Like any good manager, you take inventory, order supplies, and keep the merchandise moving. You also try to eliminate waste. This planning session will take time, but it is vital. And in the long run, it'll save both time and money.

Revive the time-honored art of "making do" (substituting) and making items from scratch. Get in the habit of reading the list of ingredients on labels on your favorite sauces, salad dressing, etc. Not only will you save money and a trip to the store - you won't be adding all those preservatives. Here are some more tips:

- You can tell a good grocery store the same way you can spot a good road side diner—by the number of "rigs" parked out front! Avoid stores with empty parking lots.
- **Ranch dressing:** Combine ½ cup mayonnaise, ¼ cup buttermilk, ¼ cup milk, 1 packet Ramen beef-flavored seasoning (from the soup mix), juice from ½ lemon, 1 tablespoon onion powder, and ¼ teaspoon garlic powder. Blend well and refrigerate.

- **Oven-fried potatoes:** Wash and scrub (unpeeled) potatoes. Make thick slices. Put 2 tablespoons vegetable oil on cookie sheet. Place slices on sheet and sprinkle with onion powder, salt, and paprika. Bake at 450 degrees for 30 minutes, turning once.

- To mimic the flavor (but not the cost or fat) of Italian sausage in your spaghetti, use a pinch of fennel seeds.

- **3-minute salsa:** Drain ½ cup of liquid from a 28 oz. can of tomatoes. (Save for another use.) Chop tomatoes while in can. Place chopped tomatoes in jar. Add ½ teaspoon garlic powder, 1 or more diced jalapenos, and ½ chopped onion. Stir, cover, and refrigerate.

- **Low cholesterol eggs:** Combine several egg whites with only 1 yolk, add a drop of yellow food coloring. (To save remaining yolks, place in small bowl, cover with water, then cover with plastic wrap.)

- Investigate your area for a “no frills” grocery store. Fewer employees, shorter store hours, and no advertising means lower prices.
- **Orange julicious:** In blender, combine 1 6-oz. can frozen orange juice concentrate (partly defrosted), 1/4 cup honey, 2 cups non-fat dry milk (liquid), 1 tablespoon vanilla extract, and 1 cup cracked ice. Whirl until frothy.
- For your next cookout, look for some meaty pork neck bones. These are often as good as spareribs—and are about half the price.
- Do you feel you need Omega-3 fatty acid in your diet? Don’t buy expensive (and possibly dangerous) fish oil supplements. Use canned tuna instead. What’s even cheaper? Canned mackerel.
- Take your recipes with a “grain of salt.” You don’t **have** to use as many chocolate chips, nuts, or mushrooms as is called for.
- **Quick seafood cocktail sauce:** Place 1 cup catsup in jar. Add the following according to taste: prepared horseradish, celery salt, cayenne pepper, and lemon juice.
- When preparing whole chickens—always freeze that little packet of giblets. When enough chicken livers accumulate, you’ll have the fixins for a fantastic appetizer—chopped liver.

One last word—don’t get “carried away” by economizing. Immediately throw out any suspicious canned goods—especially home processed items. Do not taste. Swollen and dented cans are not bargains. Botulism has no odor or taste, and is one of the most toxic substances in the world.

For the following recipe, I use bulk mozzarella cheese and pepperoni sausage, which is less expensive than buying them already grated or sliced. Also, I use bits & pieces of mush-

rooms, which are cheaper than whole button mushrooms.

#### **\$59-an-hour pizza**

*1 loaf frozen bread dough  
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 6-oz. can tomato paste  
1 can water  
½ teaspoon garlic powder  
1 teaspoon sugar  
¼ teaspoon black pepper  
½ teaspoon dried oregano  
¼ teaspoon fennel seeds  
¼ teaspoon basil  
dash of salt  
1 lb. grated mozzarella cheese  
½ lb. hamburger, cooked and drained  
4 oz. sliced pepperoni  
1 8-oz. can mushrooms  
1 small can pitted ripe olives  
½ medium onion, chopped  
½ medium bell pepper, chopped  
1 small can anchovies (optional)*

(Note: For a thicker crust, use only 1 loaf for one pizza. You can add more or less of the suggested amounts of the last seven ingredients, or omit any of those items.)

Grease loaf with vegetable oil before thawing. Grease 2 pizza pans. To prepare sauce: combine olive oil, tomato paste, water, sugar, salt, and spices in small saucepan. Stir and let simmer over low heat for 15 minutes.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

(All ingredients should be ready before doing this step because once the dough has been patted out, it should not be allowed to rise.) Cut loaf in half. Place 1 half in each pan. By stretching and patting, spread dough over each pan. Spread on sauce. Sprinkle on cheese and other ingredients. Bake 14-20 minutes (oven times will vary) until cheese is melted and crust lightly browned. Serve with Parmesan cheese and dried hot peppers. Makes two 12-inch pizzas. Δ

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### **The Builder**

*She chooses her nesting spot carefully,  
This young robin, opting for an open  
Beam bathed in sunlight all day long.  
Plenty of fresh air for her nestlings,  
With a delicatessen nearby for her Shopping. Her strutting mate  
Approves, they sign the lease, and  
Mere humans lose the use of their  
Front door and porch to new tenants.*

Linda Hutton  
Hayden, Idaho